

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 6, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write to urge you not to allow deep cuts in U.S. missile defense programs that are critically important to protecting our homeland and our allies against the growing threat of ballistic missiles.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates today announced plans to cancel or reduce such major programs as the Airborne Laser, Multiple Kill Vehicle, and the installation of additional Ground-Based Interceptor missiles in Alaska, and to cut the MDA's budget for Fiscal Year 2010 by \$1.4 billion. Although we applaud Secretary Gates' commitment to such capabilities as THAAD and SM-3, these proposals would amount to almost a fifteen percent cut in the MDA budget and a major reduction in our missile defense portfolio—actions that we fear could undermine our emerging missile defense capabilities to protect the United States against a growing threat.

As you know, the threat from ballistic missiles is significant and on the rise. Lieutenant General Daniel Maples, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, recently testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that “the threat posed by ballistic missile delivery systems is likely to increase while growing more complex over the next decade.” General Maples further warned that “adversary nations are increasingly adopting technical and operational countermeasures to defeat missile defenses.” Ballistic missile technology has already proliferated worldwide and is a direct threat to both our allies and our homeland.

The threat posed by rogue states with ballistic missiles has been underscored by Iran and North Korea's recent missile tests. In early February, Iran launched a satellite atop a rocket that could be used as an intercontinental ballistic missile. Last weekend, North Korea tested the Taepo Dong-2, a long range missile that if successful, could have the range to strike Hawaii, Alaska, and possibly the West Coast of the United States.

Although these developments highlight the danger we face, they have also revealed the progress our national missile defense system has made. When recently asked before the Senate Armed Services Committee whether the United States could intercept a Taepo Dong-2 missile that targeted the American homeland, Admiral Timothy Keating, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command, and General Patrick Chilton, Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, assured that we can do so with high probability. This would not have been the case just a few years ago, and is only the case today because we have invested in a diverse set of missile defense capabilities.

Cooperation on ballistic missile defense is also essential to our most important alliances. In the Asia-Pacific region, Japan became the first among our allies to successfully intercept a ballistic missile with the Aegis defense system. In response to North Korea's growing arsenal of missiles, the Government of Japan decided six years ago to deploy a joint Aegis and Patriot PAC-3 missile defense and has already invested \$7.9 billion of its own funds to build a new pillar of our alliance. India has likewise expressed strong interest in closer cooperation on missile defense systems, which promises to become an area of cooperation in our growing strategic partnership.

In the Middle East, we continue to develop missile defense technology in close partnership with Israel. As you know, the State of Israel faces a uniquely pressing threat due to Iran's ballistic missile program and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. In response, we have long cooperated with Israel to develop the Arrow family of missile interceptors and are now working together on the David's Sling missile defense system to defeat medium range rockets. These are critical programs that should not be abandoned.

In Europe, NATO has also endorsed the importance of missile defense as a collaborative venture among its member states. At the Bucharest summit in April 2008, NATO formally declared that "ballistic missile proliferation poses an increasing threat to Allies' forces, territory, and populations. Missile defense forms part of a broader response to counter this threat." NATO further expressed "deep concern" over the proliferation activities of both Iran and North Korea, and urged the examination of a "comprehensive missile defense architecture to extend coverage to all Allied territory and populations."

In sum, cooperation on missile defense is now a critical component of many of our closest security partnerships around the world. We fear that cuts to the budget for missile defense could inadvertently undermine these relationships and foster the impression that the United States is an unreliable ally. Moreover, sharp cuts would leave us and our friends around the world less capable of responding to the growing ballistic missile threat.

The fact remains that our adversaries continue to invest large sums in the development of these weapons. The question is whether we respond by developing appropriate defenses against them. We therefore urge you to sustain the ability of the Missile Defense Agency and the military services to develop an integrated, layered defense against the threat of ballistic missiles to the United States, our deployed forces, and our allies.

We thank you for your consideration in this matter.

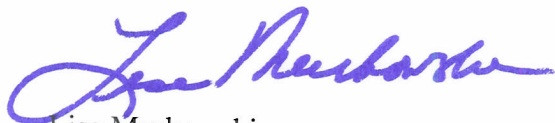
Sincerely,



Jon Kyl
United States Senator



Joseph I. Lieberman
United States Senator



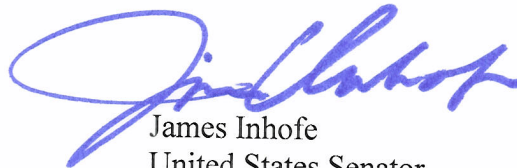
Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Mark Begich
United States Senator



Jeff Sessions
United States Senator



James Inhofe
United States Senator